

National Accountability:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED MAY 14, 1841, THE DAY OF THE

NATIONAL FAST,

OBSERVED ON ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH OF THE

PRESIDENT

OF THE

UNITED STATES.

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S E R M O N .

JEREMIAH X. 7.

Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain.

IT was a striking feature of ancient idolatry, that that idolatry was national. We find something of this feature still remaining among idolatrous nations. Time with its various changes,—intercourse of trade, science and the arts among the different nations of the earth, have done much to obscure this feature of ancient idolatry; but the present aspect of heathenism shows something of it; and as we trace back idolatry towards its Chaldean cradle, we shall find its character, as national, becoming more and more manifest. Its gods were the gods of particular nations. Poetry and sometimes philosophy too, represented them, as espousing the quarrels of their respective people; and the conflicting parties had recourse to their peculiar divinities in times of trouble. This fact lies on the face of the history of idolatry, as we meet it in the Old Testament especially;—and this fact, (as every scholar knows,) with ancient Homers and Hesiods, formed an important part of the machinery of songs. Indeed, we learn it everywhere in the history of ancient poetry, patriotism and religion. One god was supposed to be the patron and protector of one nation, and another of another. And even the daring

of Roman bravery seldom set foot upon the soil of a hostile nation, before it had paused, on the confines of the country, and done homage to its gods. By such homage, the conquering Roman desired to propitiate the deities of the countries he invaded; assuring them, that though he fought against the people, he respected their gods. And as if to court the pride of their national divinities, the Roman victor proposed to transport their worship to the imperial city; and hence, there arose within its walls that magnificent temple, dedicated “*to all the gods.*”

This fact is instructive to us. It shows us, that *men in a national capacity have a strong tendency to forsake the true God, and place their reliances somewhere else.*

It was on this principle, that the prophet was speaking, when he uttered the text; *who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain.* The idols he ridiculed were not to be feared. He pours contempt upon them in the chapter before us. In the midst of his scorn, he stops to lift his devotional heart to Jehovah, as the only *King of nations* and only to be *feared*; because *fear appertains* to him, belongs to him alone; there *is* no other God of the nations.

And it is on this principle, that we have chosen this text, to lead in the devotions of this day. This is a national day. On the recommendation of the acting Chief Magistrate of this nation, we observe this day, as a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer; on occasion of the death of the late President of the United States. If that sudden and deplorable

event may not be called a calamity, (as we think it ought to be;) surely it may be considered as a warning. Our own sentiments in this respect, are fresh in your recollections; if you have not forgotten the sermons we preached, on the Sabbath subsequent to the President's decease. We are not going to re-utter those sentiments now. We dare not so far presume on your patience or partiality. We are going to lead you to a different train of thought;—and a train, which we will aim to make worthy of your attention, and profitable to the designs and devotions of this day. As rising out of the national aim of the text, and appropriate to the national observance of this day; we propose to consider,

I. The general principle, that the retributions of God extend particularly to nations.

II. How it is that people are so much prone to be unmindful of this.

III. Some of our own special dangers in this respect.—This is our plan. We enter upon it.

I. God, as the ruler of the world, has special regard to nations, as such; and extends to them the retributions of his holy Providence. We name some particular thoughts on this head.

1. He has plainly told us this in his word.

*“He will stretch out his hand * * * and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation and dry like a wilderness. The burden of Nineveh. Nineveh is of old like a pool of water, yet shall they flee away; stand, stand, shall they cry, yet none shall look back. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold, for there is none end of the*

store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture : she is empty and void and waste, and the heart melteth and the knees smite together. Nineveh is laid waste, and who shall bemoan her.—Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people believed God and proclaimed a fast and put on sack-cloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them ; for word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and covered him with sack-cloth, and sat in ashes ; and he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh, * * * let neither man nor beast, herd nor stall taste any thing, let them not feed nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sack-cloth ; and let them cry mightily unto God ; * * * * who can tell if God will turn * * * from his fierce anger, that we perish not.”—That fast saved Ninevah. The subsequent departure from the piety, that proclaimed it, afterwards brought all its glory to the dust.

So of other nations, God says, he will rule over them. “ Nations shall serve the king of Babylon ;” and at another time, “ Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth ; for thus saith the Lord of hosts, * * * the daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor, it is time to thresh her : yet a little while and the time of the harvest shall come. The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitants of Zion say ; and my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon, and her whole land shall be confounded, and her slain shall fall in the midst of her. Though Ba-

bylon should mount up to heaven, though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from **ME** shall spoilers come upon her, saith the **Lord**, * * * the **Lord** **God** of **RECOMPENSE** shall surely requite. * * * Her mighty men shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake, saith the **King**, whose name is the **Lord** of hosts. The broad walls of **Babylon** shall be utterly broken and her high gates shall be burned with fire."

There would be no end, if we were to attempt to show you, how **God** claims to rule nations in retribution, as his own. He says, "I have put the yoke of iron on the neck of these nations ; I will shake all nations. There shall be no rain, * * * this shall be the punishment of **Egypt**, and of all the nations that come not up. Come near, ye nations to hear, * * * for the indignation of the **Lord** is upon all nations, * * * my sword shall be bathed in heaven, behold it shall come down upon **Idumea**, * * * the sword of the **Lord** is filled with blood."—Nothing can be more clear, than these declarations of **God**. He extends his retributions to nations, in their national capacity. If a nation is righteous, he protects it. If a nation, as such, is wicked, he punishes it. Men are very much prone to forget this. They are apt to esteem their national prosperity, as something of their own, and lying out of the field of **God's** retributions. They are proud of their national successes,—of their wealth, of their magnitude and of their victories,—of their governments of security and freedom, and of their statesmen and chieftains. At the same time they are prone to be indifferent to national injustice. Hence,

in the Bible, God tells us, over and over again ; and tells us just as plainly, that he is the God and King of nations, as he tells us, that he is the God of individuals. The sins of nations he will punish in this world. The virtues of nations he will reward in this world. *The Lord God of recompense will surely requite.*

2. The history of the world shows this, as plainly as God declares it. Every where we see this, in every nation's history. We find it all along the line of national existence, as far back as our knowledge of the history of nations extends. Nothing is plainer in all human history, than that, sooner or later, the destiny of nations is made to correspond with their character. God is long-suffering towards nations, as he is towards individuals ; and when his *arm is made bare in the sight of nations*, as he expresses it, and judgments are ready to descend upon the guilty ; forbearance sometimes cries from heaven, the *iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*. But, in the end, punishment, national punishment, does invariably descend upon national iniquity ;—while always national virtue secures the promotion of the common felicity of the people. Probably, we ought, on this point, to distinguish between the *nation* and its *government* ; lest we should run into the error of conceiving that government, embodied national action, is all that God regards ; and all on account of which we have reason to fear national judgments, or hope for national blessings. A government may be evil, while the people are virtuous ; and we are not to suppose, that God exercises his dominion over a nation, with a sole regard to its rulers ; and,

on account of their iniquity alone, will bring disasters upon all the people. Nor are we to suppose, that justice and all uprightness in the action of government will secure national blessings from God upon a vicious and unprincipled people. The retributions of God have respect rather to the character of the nation of individuals, than to the mere character and administration of the government they live under. But the national government is, in some sense, an embodied representation of the character of the people. Sooner or later, the people stamp their own character upon the government itself. It is, what they have made it. No matter, in what manner their influence has approached it, and borne upon its character and wielded its activity ; in all cases, it does approach it, and after the lapse of a few years, the government of a nation becomes the embodied representation of the character of its people, or of their deservings. On this principle it is, that God extends his national retributions to national governments. Through government itself, he rewards virtue and punishes vice in the people. He makes it one instrument in the hand of his justice. There is no other one thing, which is so fair and just a representation of the character of any people, as its government, under all the ordinary circumstances of nations. And hence, through government, more commonly than in any other method, does the God of nations communicate his blessings to the good, and bring his strokes of chastisement or of vengeance upon the bad.

And if, as we look back on the history of man, we blend together the idea of the government of a

uation, and the idea of the character of its people ; we see everywhere, that the *King of nations*, has extended righteous retributions to the nations of the earth. Not only has the kingdom of David been divided ; and afterwards, the thrones of Judah and Israel crumbled, as the nations sinned ;—not only did Judah endure longest, because Israel sinned most ;—but beyond God's covenant people, and out among all the other nations, we see him, pouring blessings on the virtuous, and dealing the blows of his indignation upon the evil. While the eyes of men see it not, and the evil hearts of men fear it not ; a train of causes is at work, whose operation undermines prosperity, and lays the sure foundation of national disease, and ultimately of national decay and dissolution. At the very moment, when a people are sending up their shouts of joy for the success of their arms ; a nurtured ambition among their sons, a panting for military renown, (that emptiest of all bubbles,) is laying in her stores of material, for an explosion, which shall ultimately shake the nation into pieces, as a just judgment of God ! At the very moment, when worldliness is most gratified, and rivers of riches are rolling into her lap ; either extravagance is pluming their wings for a speedy flight ; or cupidity, drunk with a vain expectation, is preparing to venture all, upon some South-sea bubble ; or idleness, a criminal lack of industry, a disposition to live without labor, is training up the young to become a generation of evil, and the instruments of a national degradation or downfall. Babylon has fallen. The mines of her own mountains, and afterwards those of Mexico

and Peru made Spain rich, but they ruined her : they corrupted her sons, they led them to pride, idleness and impiety ; and the blood, which has been flowing, ever since I can remember, in her vales and on her mountains, has *not* flowed, from the veins of a people, who feared and obeyed God. His indignation has followed in her track of sin ; and who can read her history and not cry, *who would not fear thee, O King of nations ?*—The injustice, luxury and ambition of Rome ruined her. The still progressing ruin, that stalks over the former pride of her seven hills, is only the footsteps of a God of just indignation ! The hour of her punishment has come ! The men of the North pushed back upon her very walls the shock of her own injustice ; and now, the malaria of her own morasses is steadily carrying death to those spared by the sword of blood !—All history is like this, as far back as we can read it. God does punish wicked nations. The historian tells the tale of fact, as plainly as God threatens it in his word. And when the historian can go no farther, the antiquary travels on, among the ruins of ancient cities in the old world and the new ; all whose proud palaces are crumbling in the solitude of decay ; and the very *name* of whose former inhabitants, sometimes cannot be gathered from all the amazing memorials of their former existence. Perhaps their very name has perished, in order that the dreadful amount of their wickedness should not be known to us. At any rate, as far as we do know, whenever we read of national disaster and downfall; wherever our footsteps strike up the relics of perished greatness ; in all cases, these

downfalls and this vanished glory have been the just dues of national iniquity ! History is full of national warnings,—full of the idea of the text. These warnings come to us, to teach us to fear God, and not trust too much in national greatness, government and glory. They come to us from the decaying *now*, of wicked nations in our sight ;—and from the lingering echoes, that moan over such places as Thebes, and Babylon, and Nineveh, and Idumea, and Sardis, and Tadmor in the desert. God has not suffered unrighteousness in nations to escape him. He will not. *Moab shall be trodden down under him, *** Bozrah shall become a desolation, *** Edom shall become a desolation, *** a sword is upon the Chaldeans, *** a sword is upon the liars, *** cut it off from being a nation, *** thou shalt be cut down, oh madmen, *** because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt be taken.*

3. There is a propriety in this retribution. It is fit, that God should punish and reward nations in this world, as they deserve. Nations do not exist in eternity. There, individuals will be judged, each by himself. No doubt, they will be judged for the sins committed here, as parts of nations ; and will have to answer for their individual criminality. But in this world, while God does *not* reward and punish particular persons, according to their character ; he does punish and reward nations exactly according to their deservings. There is no other way of showing his regard for national sins and national virtues,—his regard for associated virtue and vice. It is fit, that he should show it in this way. It is well for us that he does. Our choicest interests

have intimate connexion with the government we live under,—with the *action* of the nation, in its administration of law, its enactment of laws, and in its peace and wars. All our precious things lie at the national disposal. Outward, earthly felicity, (so wicked is the world,) depends entirely, under God, upon government, law and its administration,—upon all, that we call national justice. All our property, liberty, privileges and lives may be defended by national righteousness, or ruined by national iniquity. Unjust laws may crush all the fruits of our individual industry and enterprise ; may dishearten frugality, labor and study ; and unjust wars, waged by the nation, may lay our houses in ashes, and pour out our blood, on the dust of our ravaged fields. And since these sins are committed in a national capacity, and *that* capacity is going to cease, as we leave this world for another ; it is fit, it is proper, that God should punish them here. It is well for us, that by retributive national justice, he does show his regard for our earthly interests ; and throw around them the protection of his warnings against national sins.

It is true, we may feel some sentiments of a foolish rebellion against this trait of God's government ; and in folly may flatter ourselves, that the whole idea of this retribution belongs more to superstition, than to reality. But as long as the Bible lives, and as long as the history of near six thousand years of our race lives ; this great doctrine will live with them.

The objection made to this doctrine, is grounded principally on the idea, that if God so deals with

nations, then the innocent suffer with the guilty ;—because, when a nation is chastised or desolated, those persons, who have had little or no part in the sins, which have provoked chastisement, (women and children,) suffer quite as sadly, as the most active transgressors ;—and because, often the punishment does not come, till the generation who have provoked it, have gone to another world.—In respect to this objection, we have five things to say.

(1.) The *nation* still exists, though the individuals are dead. The sin, which God punishes was committed by the nation as such ; and it is vastly beneficial to us, that God has shown us he will not suffer nations to sin with impunity. Among our strongest affections are those for our children ; and God warns us from national impiety and injustice, lest their punishment should come on our posterity, when we are dead and gone.

(2.) Social liabilities is one of the laws of the world ; and there seems to be no more impropriety or hardship, in this national retribution of God ; than there is, when children are born in poverty, and grow up in rags and ignorance, on account of the vice and profligacy of their parents ;—or when they inherit feebleness and disease ;—or when the primeval fall

“brings death into the world, and all our wo.”

(3.) In the infliction of national judgments, Jehovah’s retribution is far more just to the suffering individuals *themselves*, than our superficial thinking is prone to suspect. True, the stroke of his indignation, frequently, is not felt by the nation ; till the

generation, whose offence he punishes, have all gone to another world. But the generation, on whom it falls, (aside from the law of social liabilities,) may be punished more justly than we think ; and that, on three accounts.

First. This generation may be following the evil example of its predecessors ;—an example, which they ought to have detested ; and though doing *less* injustice, they may be *more* guilty, as sinning against more light ; and thus, identifying themselves with the iniquity of their fathers, upon them may come justly, *all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zaccharias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar.*

Second. This generation, upon whom the judgments of God have come for the past sins of the nation, may suffer justly ; because they approve, perhaps, and will not openly condemn, the shameful unrighteousness of past generations. That unrighteousness, though committed no longer, may form the standing boast of a nation's glory, as it often does,—(I think of Copenhagen ;)—and shall not God punish justly the people, whose effrontery will applaud the disgraceful causes of their national prosperity and national shame ?

Third. This generation, punished for past national sins, may suffer justly perhaps, because, by an identity of interest with past generations, it forms one subject of moral accountability ; and God deals with the nation, as if it were one criminal individual ;—as if it were responsible at one time, for sins committed at another. In such a case, God maintains his justice, when he gathers his vengeance

over those, who have abused his forbearance, and punishes crimes committed now by a nation, with those committed before. This is one of the common methods of his vengeance. It falls on one of the most common of national sins. What more usual, than for a nation of men, instead of amending the injuries of their ancestors, to enjoy their national usurpations ? Doing so, they are *themselves* usurpers ; and God may justly hold them responsible for the *whole injury* of the usurpation : The whole is theirs, if they could amend it, and would not. He held the Amorites so, four hundred years after their national offence began. He held the Jews so, in the days when the Saviour rebuked them. A nation, who will not repair former national injuries, and restore former national usurpations, becomes *one* with the generation before them ; and God will *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*.—For these three reasons, we can perceive, that a generation of men suffering a national punishment, inflicted for the sins of their ancestors, may suffer with more justice, than superficial and transient thinking might suppose.

(4.) We have a *fourth* answer to this objection against our doctrine of national retribution. For, though this retributive justice of God should make the innocent suffer with the guilty ; he knows how to make the very sufferings of the innocent benefits to them, and will do so. Fruitful seasons feed the idle sometimes, and fatten the bloated epicure ; but often, very often, God poisons all their pleasures, and prevents their reaping the benefits intended for those, whose virtuous industry he would reward.

(5.) The last answer to this objection is, that the benefits of God's national retributions are inconceivably greater, than all their supposed inconveniences. Under his moral economy over the nations, while he deals with them as if they were moral persons ; there is a warning against unrighteousness, *where, just where*, the combined power and combined pride of a nation seem to need it. For example, they need it, amid the temptations and delusions of war. There may be glory in arms, but there is little *conscience* about them. Usurpations and victories are seldom accompanied by remorse. Alas ! it is too true, that pride and vanity, both foolish, both remorseless, usually lift up a nation's flag ; and it is a shame to human nature, that it hath brought so *little shame*, to bear against the injustice of a nation's usurpations ! It seems, as if even scorn were made afraid by the bayonets of an army, and the thunder of its artillery ; and dared not even cry, **SHAME**, when the Indies are subjugated, and Polands are blotted from the map of nations !—It is well that God has told us, *He is King of nations* ; and has thus thrown some little fear of *his* justice, when blind pride, and vanity, and ambition will fear no other. And if under God's national control, the guilty individuals sometimes escape, and the virtuous suffer ; the benefits of God's national retributions are, after all, of no small advantage to the world. An innocent man may suffer in our courts of justice ; but the general benefits of law are manifest. That same innocence might, and probably would, suffer more, if there were no law. And should we refuse submission to legal decisions, because our

justice is sometimes fallible ; all society would be in confusion, and all property and lives insecure. Every wise man will cheerfully submit to the occasional injustice, for the sake of the general advantages of the system. And this is what every wise man will do, and rejoice in the submission ; when the system of God's national retributions places him in a position of hardship.

These are the main things we have to say under the first head of this sermon. God's retributions of justice do especially extend to nations in this world as such ;—he himself tells us so,—history plainly shows it ;—and, in spite of all the objections to it in particular cases, it is, manifestly, a beneficial and benevolent system.

II. We proposed to show how it is, that people are prone to be unmindful of this sovereignty of God over nations.

In connection with the destiny of nations, there lie, (as we said,) all the dearest interests of man. Science, civilization, liberty, property, religion, life, are affected by national injustice and downfall,—by national virtue, and the smiles of God upon it. And it does seem very strange, that the retributive dominion of God over nations has received no more regard among men ; especially among those engaged in public and national employ. But so it is. There are few sins so unlikely to be repented of, as national ones ; though, in fact, the vengeance due, comes to no other sins, so speedily and so surely, as the due measure of vengeance comes to these. Men, acting in a national capacity, seem to feel themselves shielded by the power of the nation.

Official men sit in the places of office, as places of pride ; and pride makes them forget God, and their responsibilities. Hence they do injustice often ; and such injustice, as would receive the public rebuke of the nation, if the same pride were not sown among the people, which has mounted up to the seat of the statesman, and gone forth on the field of the chieftain. When men think and feel in a national capacity, individual conscience is most wonderfully lost in their associated circumstances. Acting together, instead of feeling, as they ought, that their responsibilities are multiplied ; it is one of the weaknesses of human nature, to think they are *divided* ; and that only a small portion falls to the lot of each. Men do act, in association with others, as they would not act, alone. They form a new code for conscience,—a new system of morality. Hence, nations and the rulers of nations, as such, are exceedingly prone to forget righteousness and the God of righteousness ; and often perpetrate, without conscience or fear, those national sins, which bring down the just judgments of God.

Another cause for this blind and criminal heedlessness, is found in the fact, that men do not see the connection between national iniquity and its punishment. The great causes, which affect nations, are seldom quick in movement ;—God exercises forbearance ;—and the sin and its vengeance are too far apart, to have the latter noticed, as the result of the former. National judgments come too slow, sometimes lingering on the long march of centuries ; and man's little and limited mind, aided into darkness by the lack of social conscience and

his pride of heart, does not see the sure footsteps of God's indignation, steadily approaching a nation's criminality.

And besides ; in all impiety towards God, there is a wonderful lack of even ordinary wisdom ; and nowhere, is this evil so common, as in national impiety. There, it makes men utterly blind, to the most sure and established certainties that exist. Nations, whole nations of men regard that, as their strength, which is their virtual weakness ; and while they utter their gratulations of joy, they have reason to give utterance to the moanings of apprehension and distress. Their public delusions are very common. Their sudden riches, in which they exult, are often putting into operation a train of causes, which shall first poison, and then crush their proudest prosperity. Their fertile soil invites to idleness or to luxury, and soon bears on its abused bosom, a degraded and worthless population. But nowhere, perhaps, has this idea so striking an exemplification, as in the pride and the power of arms. National prowess, and national victory are rejoiced in, by a whole people ;—the hero is greeted by a universal shout of applause ;—and the thousand thunders of deep-mouthed cannon send forth the noise of a nation's victory, glory and rejoicings, on the wings of the wind !—All false—all deceptive—all shortsighted !—all as foolish towards earth, as it is impious towards heaven ! There may be, sometimes, a propriety in this ; but we speak in the general, and in reference to the forgetfulness, that God is *King of nations*. And usually, amid these military gloryings of a nation, a *war-spirit* is culti-

vating among her sons ;—a race of soldiers is raising up to ruin her ;—a Cæsar, to turn Rome into a prison-house for its most virtuous citizens, and to place, in the midst of her miseries, a guarded palace, for a race of imperial Cæsars ! History is full of this national misconception. We can scarcely glance at a page without seeing it. Almost every where, we find some Paris, proud of some Napoleon's victories ; some France, drunk with the dream of glory ; and alas ! in their impious forgetfulness of God, the *King of nations*, they know not, nor fear, that they are making the city into a citadel for soldiery, and the whole empire into a field for a cruel military despotism ! But they will rejoice in the glory of that despotism still. Dazzled with its splendor, they will not behold its workings of corruption among the people, nor revolt from its tyranny ;—till finally, when virtue, true virtue, is all undermined ; when a generation of soldiers is raised up, and that generation is the *nation* ; when this bubble glory is every thing to the people ; and nothing is worth living for but human butchery ;—the public passion, like the conqueror, pants for Moscow and Petersburgh ; the victory of some Borodino is worse than defeat ; the flames of Moscow shall precede the blood of Waterloo ; and Paris shall be hemmed in with hostile bayonets, and lie at the mercy of a ready artillery ! The nation is prostrate,—the empire is dismembered ! Well might her millions cry, *who would not fear THEE, O King of nations !*

This is no more than an ordinary occurrence—it is a common chapter of history. This is the me-

thod, in which nations, in pride and ambition,—by gradual corruption,—by sinking individual conscience,—by *glorying in their shame*, become fit victims for God's righteous indignation !

But we must hasten to the

III. Last thing we proposed. To name some of our own special sources of danger, in respect to the idea of the text. We refer not to its idolatry, but to our danger of placing too great reliances, in our national capacity, upon something else, than the *King of the nations*.

The people of this country are not to be blamed for prizes their position ; remote from the martial nations of the other continent, and not peculiarly exposed, by proximity, to be embroiled in their strifes. They are not to be blamed for prizes the salubrity of the climate, and the fertility of the soil. They are not to be blamed for prizes the vigor and enterprize, which characterize them ; and that vast extent of country, which nourishes population enough, to give vastness and majesty to national strength. For all these things, they have reason to be grateful. And perhaps, these are not their peculiar sources of unwise and impious reliance. If they are, we may, on this occasion, justly pass them by. The occasion relates especially to government, and the Chief Magistrate, whom Divine Providence hath removed from its head. On these points the death of the President admonishes us, and these *are* the two, wherein, it seems to me, we are in danger of a kind of national idolatry.

In respect to our reliances too much on men, and forgetting to fear Jehovah, the *King of nations* ; it

is easy to perceive, that our whole people may be in danger, because, having justly discarded the idea of the divine right of kings, we are exposed to the error of forgetting the divine sovereignty over the nation ;—we acknowledge no hereditary offices ;—we select from among the people, the men of our own choice, and place them in the seats of office, from the lowest to the highest.

We name this idea and leave it, because, on a former occasion, the occurrence, which we deplore, admonished you, *Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help ; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to the earth.*

We take up the other idea. As a nation we are in no small danger of a kind of *governmental* idolatry.

It is natural perhaps, that, as a nation, we should idolize our constitution. Its history seems to hint this danger. It was the result of a struggle, still comparatively recent ; whose origin was the spirit of liberty opposed to governmental oppression. The story of that struggle is familiar to our ears ; and we connect it, at once, with our national existence and national government, and with all the security and enjoyments of our private life. The sublimity of devotion in that deep-breathing strife ; —its tale of heroic wonders ;—its thousand thrilling incidents ;—the blood, which was poured from thousands of willing hearts ;—and the tales of the revolution, which our youthful ears listened to, from the lips of scarred and war-worn veterans ; all stand in such connection with governmental oppression, and with the history of our own free constitu-

tion; that we may be tempted to sin, taking refuge rather under the shadow of our free constitution, than under the shadow of Jehovah's wings. These things all tended to bring us up, a generation, whose hearts would circle round our constitution and government, with a half idolatrous attachment and trusting. There has been much in our history tending to this. The nature of our armies,—not as hirelings, not Hessians, but freemen, that would be free, braving the contest and succeeding, is one fact, whose influence, (I am afraid,) we have abused, as many of those men would *not*, to make us forget, that the *battle*, without God, is *not to the strong*. Of the same impious influence have been the wide-spread incidents of that struggle, on sea and land, in rivers, bays and mountains,—the *only* great military mustering of the nation, the only universal trumpet-summons, which has ever driven her echoes into every vale, and over every mountain of the country. This was the nation's birth. And out of all this, and our brief subsequent history, we have not a little reason to fear, that our nation has formed a national temptation to lose the *fear of the King of nations*.

You may find indications of this impiety;—indications of an idolatrous trusting in government. You may find them, in the noise of the pettiest politician, and mounting up to the highest seats of legislation, often the places of a vain national boastings. You may find them in the fact, that this noise and boasting are so little checked by the sober sense of the people. The boastful vanity, which would plunge us into a needless war, vapors in high

places unrebuked ; and seats of high office are contaminated with the occupancy of drunkards and duellists and profanity ! These are fearful signs ! A righteous nation will elevate righteous men ! Ours seems so confident in its constitution, that it greatly forgets God : as if even wicked instruments could do us no harm, under a plan of government so perfect.

Our free constitution places government more immediately in the popular power. Every body becomes here a guardian of the nation, and a patron and protector of the constitution. Yes, and resting under its shade, our people have the double habit of honoring the constitution ; at once, as a child of their love and promise, and the father and bestower of their liberty, security and rights. With us, government is a thing of our own ;—a creature, for every man to take care of. It is not some distant and inaccessible dignity, surrounded with a repulsive and inscrutable mysteriousness. It is every man's business. It is liable to become a matter of every man's idolatrous trusting ;—and then, if his selfish and sinful purposes are not reached, a matter of his sinful and short-sighted enmity.

You may find indications of this impiety also. They are to be seen, in the use of public station for private ends ; in the readiness, for example, with which men would do injustice by acts of legislation ; as if the vengeance of a just God could be shunned, by the shield and cover of the forms of human law ; as if individuals could sin through public and associated action, and be in no danger of drawing down vengeance upon themselves and all around them.

Such sins, instead of being, as many think them, less fearful, than private or individual transgressions ; are vastly more so. They are more mean. They are more ungenerous and cowardly. They injure, at once, public and private interests. And the man, who has less conscience about rectitude, because, associated with government, is under the double danger of bringing bolts of vengeance upon his own head, and the head of all those associated with him under the same governmental order ! And it is worthy of our most serious meditation, that this *is* the very *class of sins*, which God has visited, with the severest of all earthly vengeance. It is the vengeance, which has made the world's history, a history of blood and carnage ;—has burnt villages ; sacked cities ; shaken nations to pieces ;—and as if its evils were not yet ended ; has left that feudal and military impress, upon the genius of almost all the governments of Christendom, which *invites war*. The heaviest of all heaven's vengeance on earth, is that, which has fallen on account of that *class of sins*, perpetrated almost without conscience, because under the supposed shield of a nation's government.—And when we see this in the history of the world, and find indications of its coming in our own national course ; how can we avoid lifting up the deprecating cry of this day,—*who would not fear THEE, O King of nations ?*

We have had, in our national experience, from the first, but little to compel us to feel our national dependence on God. Famines, floods, pestilences have been few. The seasons and the soil have not driven us, by their hardships, to God. The latter

has been too fertile ; and the former, too salubrious, for this. We have come almost to feel, that our government is a sure engine for our felicity ;—that we can plant deep on the pillars of our constitution, and *have*, (maintaining in regularity the various machinery of government,) little or nothing to fear.

My dear hearers,—without fearing the *King of nations*, we have every thing to fear ! An impious nation cannot long prosper. Impiety will poison her prosperity, and God will turn her very blessings into curses ! Honesty, industry, and peacefulness among the people ;—a willingness to labor ;—sobriety, brotherly kindness, generosity, thankfulness towards God for his mercies ; the observance of his Sabbaths ; the prizing of his word and worship ; the habit of prayer ;—these are things, which will give us more security, as a nation ; than our idolized constitution, and all our battlements and bravely and cannons of defence.

And if the story about our departed President is true, it may well give depth to the afflictions of this day. It is said, that while training grape-vines with the gardener, the latter proposed the procuring of a watch-dog, to guard the fruit against the depredations of vicious boys. The President is said to have replied ;—it would be better to procure a Sabbath School teacher ; for then, we should not only save the fruit, but the boys too from ruin.—If that story is truth, we may well mourn the loss of such a man, from the Presidential chair. The fear of God in our rulers, and a sensibility that our security stands connected with the virtue, intelligence

and piety of the people, are the two best qualifications that our rulers can ever have.

But God has removed the chief of the nation. He seems to have touched us on the very point of our national idolatry. In our civil reliances, our political pride and zeal, our patriot-prizing of the most free government on earth, and our devoted zeal for its perpetuity ; we have been too unmindful of the government of the God of heaven. It is his blessing only, that can make government either beneficial or permanent ;—and without such a blessing, it will become an engine of ill.

God is warning the nation. It becomes the nation to heed it. But, my hearers, you will be assembled here, in vain, to-day, if you have not, as individuals, a true humiliation, for the sins, which have provoked God ; and a true repentance for them. Here lies your danger. You are peculiarly exposed to it. The forms of humiliation are not enough. You will be greatly liable to regard this day only as the nation's, and not your own. Let it not be so. Search out your own sins. Be humbled, personally, on account of them. See wherein you have offended God, by pride, by carnal security, by extravagance, especially by covetousness, and by a desire to have a government make you rich. You who are Christians, examine into your life of religion. See, whether you have not been borne away with the multitude, to a criminal conformity to the world. Ask your Bibles,—ask your closets,—ask your consciences before God. See, whether your philanthropy and your patriotism have been warmly in exercise,—and so *wisely*, that you would

have thought of the Sabbath School teacher, like the President, sooner than of the watch-dog, like the gardener. Men of God, on you it mainly depends, to have this day profitable to the nation. If you are not improved by it, you cannot expect others to be. Aim to be truly humble, wherever you discover that you have sinned. If you find a languishing in your personal religion ; if you recollect an inattention to social and private prayer ; if you discover a criminal covetousness in your hearts ; if you recollect excessive excitements, or partisan asperities in political affairs ; if you remember that your zeal has been small for the salvation of souls, after all nations shall be swept away ;—these are things to repent of, to confess to God, and receive reformation. If these are your sins, they do the *nation* an injury, and expose it to divine displeasure.

You, who are rich ;—examine, whether you have provided *bags that wax not old*, and have *used* your riches, as dependant on God, and grateful to God the giver.

You, who are poor ;—remember the temper of Him, *who had not where to lay his head*. If you have murmured ; you have sinned. If you have looked to government, more than to God, for an improvement of your circumstances ; you have sinned, and you ought to heed well the call of this day of confession.

You, who are in office ;—to you, this day is a pointed warning. You see, how suddenly the anxieties of office may lie still, under the deep silence of the shroud ! If, in official station, you have sought private ends ; have not used office for the

public good ; you have sinned, sinned, at once, against the nation and against God ;—and this day ought to reform your errors.

You, who are accustomed to rush into political strifes ;—yours, (I am afraid,) is one of the sins, which has clothed the nation in sackcloth ! See to it, that while you value good government, and strive for it, you do not forget God. The event we deplore seems to have softened political rancor. Now, let it lead us to a pious dependance. Let your hearts learn to say, as you look to human government, *who would not fear Thee, O King of nations ?*

Men of business ;—the day speaks to you. Your hopes gathered round the man, who now sleeps in the tomb ! The pall, the pall has fallen upon the brightest spot of your expectations ! Oh ! how easy for God to blast every hope ! *Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations ?*

Fathers ;—the day speaks to you. Your fond hopes have been, that when you should sleep in the dust, you would leave to your children, the blessed legacy of your prized and free constitution. God grant you may. But if you have prized freedom, engraven deep on the pillars of your constitution, more than you have prized virtue, intelligence, and piety among the people, you have sinned ;—you have sinned, as fond fathers ;—you have sinned, as members of the commonwealth ;—you have sinned against the claimed sovereignty of God ! Examine ; and, in the light of history and inspiration, lift up your hands before your children, *who would not fear Thee, O King of nations ?*

Mothers, wives, sisters ;—your sex has often de-

preached the anger of God against nations ! Perhaps your fathers, husbands and sons have sinned, in those public affairs, from which, you are happily free ! Pray for them. Pray for yourselves. And let the power of your piety send a hallowed influence, out among worldly agitations, and up to the high seats of office ! Remind the ruder sex, that, after all, Jehovah is *King of the nations !*

Young men ;—you have been nursed into manhood in a stormy and perilous season. The grand error of your fathers lies on the face of the text. Shun it. Have piety towards God. That is the best patriotism, the surest wealth, the surest hold of national prosperity and your own. The pall, that covers the nation, warns you not to sin, as your fathers have done.

But death warns us ! Sackcloth covers the nation ! My dear hearers, what is the world ? It is little more than a place of mourning, and dying, and tombs ! The entrance-gate of eternity will soon be opened for every one of you ! Nations will be swept aside ! The world will vanish ! Eternity alone will endure ! Prostrate yourselves before Him, who is *King of nations*, and King of your coming eternity ! Each one of your *souls* is worth more, than all the earthly interests of the proudest nation the sun shines on ! To-day, turn in penitence and in the faith of Jesus, to the *King of nations* ; and make Him, the Lord God of your salvation ! The Lord save us. *Amen.*